

Clans Imperium Book 1: Skyward

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Summary: The story of Rainclan, Silverclan, Stoneclan, and Goldclan. It seemed as if the clans were recovering from the near conquest of an ambitious overlord. However, the deep-rooted grudge of one cat would change the lives of the forest cats forever. Do these clans have the strength to stand up to the birth of a new era?

1. Prologue and Allegiances

****Prologue****

"Father! Why do you have to do this again? Why is our clan at war again?" Skypaw's distressed mew sounded as his father, Regalclaw, comforted him with his tail. Their leader, Dawnstar had declared war on Shadestar after many border disputes. Their clans had been in a rocky relationship for months now, and at last, the climax of these tensions was approaching in the form of a war. Stupid, stupid Shadestar! No, Dawnstar's just as bad!_

"Skypaw_ Skypaw_ I don't like this either. However, it is my duty as a warrior of Goldclan to fight for my clan. If our leader declares war, then it is my responsibility to act," Regalclaw replied calmly. How can he be so calm? He could die out there just like any other cat! What will Lightray and I do without you? Lightray was Skypaw's mother and mate to Regalclaw. Because she was expecting kits, she was exempt from the upcoming war.

"What if you get hurt!? Let me come with you! I'll protect you!" Skypaw insisted. Regalclaw purred with amusement.

"Now there. You've only become an apprentice two sunrises ago. Dawnstar already decided that new apprentices would not take part in such a dangerous battle. Stay in the camp and wait for us to come back. I promise you, we'll win this war. I promise you, I'll return." He's lying. He doesn't feel confident at all!

"Why do our clans have to fight all the time anyway? Why can't this

conflict be settled peacefully!?" Skypaw whined. _It just doesn't make senseâ€|_

"I've always hated clan rivalries," Regalclaw began. "I've always wondered why our clans were separated as they were. If everyone was to work together and live in harmony, perhaps wars could be avoided." Regalclaw sighed. "Unfortunately, that's not how it works. We've always had a separation in clans. It's been like this since ancient timesâ€|"

"That's not true! I heard that originally, everyone belonged to the same clan! Why can't we go back to _that!?!_"

"It's not that simple Skypaw," Regalclaw purred. "I can see I've raised quite the idealistic son." Regalclaw licked Skypaw on the cheek. "I can't bide any more time here. I need to leave for the battle. Wait for me when I get back, and I'll tell you all about the brave Stoneclan warriors that I took down!" Regalclaw dashed out to meet his fellow clanmates who were gathering at the clan entrance. Dawnstar herself took the lead. Her deputy, Ripplewind, was there too. Even Hawkleaf, the medicine cat was present, probably to be on spot to heal battle injuries. Along with them was Regalclaw and a bunch of various warriors and older apprentices. Skypaw watched in distress as they walked away. _Please! Please come back!_

It seemed as if moons had gone by, yet the camp was still mostly empty and silent. _They're not back yet! What's taking them?_ Skypaw paced back and forth as a raindrop hit his head. He looked up to see the clouds burst into storm. Skypaw shivered. _I have a bad feeling about this. I'd better go check on them. But wait, what if Dawnstar gets mad?_

"Are you worried about your father?" He heard Lightray's voice from behind him. He turned to see his mother padding up to him, her pelt starting to get wet by the falling rain. "You shouldn't be out when it's storming. Come inside the nursery with me." But Skypaw couldn't bring himself to. _Noâ€| I can't be standing around when the clan is at battle. I'm an apprentice of Goldclan. I should be fighting with them!_

"Iâ€| I have to go!" Skypaw shouted, turning around and dashing out of the camp.

"Wait, come back! Stop right here!" He heard his mother calling him from behind, but he ignored it. _Wait for me, father!_

The sounds of warring cats pierced his ears as Skypaw ran through the Stardust mountain paths. Around he could see cats from both Goldclan and Stoneclan fighting. He tried scanning to see where Regalclaw was, but was unsuccessful. "S-Skypaw? What are you doing! You need to get back to camp!" Ripplewind's distressed voice called from a little ways away. The deputy was currently fighting another cat from Stoneclan. The big black tom from Stoneclan pushed Ripplewind down. Ripplewind yelped in surprise.

"Ripplewind!" Skypaw yelled, rushing to his aid. But a cat slammed into him, causing him to see stars.

"Urghhhâ€|" Skypaw stood up to see a brown and red furred apprentice facing him.

"My name's Amberpaw! I'm going to be leader of Stoneclan someday! Fight me, for the glory of your clan!" He challenged. But Skypaw ignored Amberpaw. _I don't have time for this!_ Skypaw dashed passed him. He could no longer see Ripplewind, as the two cats had seemingly moved from that spot. The sky slowly turned darker as the night crept its way in. As Skypaw rushed through the canyon paths, he realized that he didn't recognize where he was. _I've never explored too far into this place before!_ Usually, Stoneclan would teach its apprentices how to navigate these mountains so they wouldn't get lost, however, Skypaw had not had such training yet.

"Regalclaw! Where are you? Father!?" Skypaw called.

"What do we have here? A lost apprentice calling for his daddy? Ready to become birdprey, Goldclan rat?" A warrior called from behind. _Oh no!_ Skypaw ducked his head as the warrior jumped to attack him. He heard a loud thud and the yelp of the warrior. He looked up to see Dawnstar's beautiful white and gold fur.

"Skypaw! Run away! Get back to camp!" She yelled frantically, pinning the Stoneclan warrior down. Skypaw nodded and ran towards the now clear path. Fear ran through his pelt as he dashed. _Where am I? Where's father? Where's the exit?_ Skypaw frantically turned his head, trying to find a path to take, as he had stumbled upon a fork in the road. It was in that moment, that a patch of white fur caught his eye. Skypaw immediately felt pins running down his body. _No!_ He ran towards what looked to be a bloodstained white furred cat lying in the dirt.

"Regalclaw!" Skypaw yelped as he approached the cat. It was as he had feared. Regalclaw was lying around a pool of blood. The blood was dripping from a wound on his neck. "Stay put! I'll go get Hawkleaf! You're gonna be okay!"

"Skypaw! Thank Starclan. I got to see you again before I go." Regalclaw coughed and blood splattered on the hard rocky floor.

"Don't speak! It'll only make you bleed more!" Skypaw started to panic. His breathing became quick, his heart was pounding very hard. Heat rumbled through his body. Anxiety began to peak heavily. _Don't die! Please don't die on me!_

"Skypaw! don't look so sad. I don't like seeing you so sad!" Regalclaw mewed weakly. _No! No! NO!_ "I'm going to have to leave you now! Please! Take care of Lightray." _Stop saying these things!_

"You're gonna be fine! C'mon! Get up! I'll support you back to camp!" Skypaw pleaded. But his father only lay there, panting.

"If only our clans could have lived peacefully." Regalclaw's eyes shut and his breathing slowed to a stop.

"No! No! NO! Wake up! Please! Wake up!" Skypaw frantically prodded his father's body. But Regalclaw remained unmoving. Skypaw's legs gave way as he collapsed onto the ground. He buried his face into his paws. It was then that it hit him. _Clan rivalries! Was my father's life worth that!? All this pointless fighting. Cats dying

left and right. It's got to stop! _I'll_ stop it! No matter what it takes! _

Skypaw stood up, feeling a new strength welling through him. He looked up at to the sky. "Starclan! Are you listening!? I'm going to unite the clans! Then, we'll all live as one! Do you hear me!?" _This is how it should be. This is how it will be. I'll do whatever it takes, I'll create a new Empire! Pleaseâ€| watch over me, father.

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* * *

><p>Clan Allegiances

****RAINCLAN:****

****Leader:** ****Redstar (Redfang)** â€" A reddish brown tom cat with amber eyes

****Deputy:** ****Stormfall** â€" a Gray tabby tom with blue eyes and a black tip of fur on his tail

****Medicine Cat:**** **Whistleleaf** â€" A white she-cat with beautiful blue eyes

****Apprentice:** ****Firesoul** â€" A ginger white tom with amber eyes

****Warriors:** ****Emeraldclaw** â€" A snow white tom with emerald, green eyes

Autumnwind â€" A brown and black spotted tom cat with brown eyes.

Grayvine â€" A gray tortoiseshell tom cat with green eyes

Apprentice: Blackpaw â€" A sleek black she-cat

Spottedfur â€" A brown tabby tom

Apprentice: Steampaw â€" A tiny, gray tom

Mistyfur â€" A blue gray she-cat

Apprentice: Racingpaw â€" A brown tom with a torn right ear

Raccoonwater â€" A tall black tom

Apprentice: Windpaw â€" A gray she-cat known for her fast running speed

Owltone â€" a White and black spotted tom-cat

Leafshine â€" A brown tabby she-cat

Dewstone â€" A white and gray she-cat

Springfur â€" A pure gray tom-cat

Lionleap â€" A ginger tom-cat with a striped tail

Pearstem â€" A gray she-cat with one white forepaw

Fawnshine â€" A snow white she-cat

Cloverdew â€" A black she-cat with green eyes

****Queens:****

Shallowpond: - A gray tortoiseshell she-cat with blue eyes

Kits: Icykit â€" white she-cat, Meadowkit â€" gray she-cat, Pyrekit â€" black tom

Dreamsong: - A white and gray spotted she-cat with amber eyes

Kits: Sleetkit â€" a grey she-cat that is mute, Moorkit â€" a black she-cat

****Elders:****

Oakleaf â€" A white tomcat with blue eyes

Flamewillow â€" An old ginger tom

Snowpath â€" A white she-cat with a gray patch of fur on her flank

****Silverclan****

****Leader: **Riverstar (Rivershine) â€" A light gray tom with dark blue eyes and dark tipped ears**

****Deputy: **Lunarpelt â€" A grey she-cat with a crescent moon shaped patch of dark fur on her flank**

Apprentice: Lovepaw â€" A ginger she-cat with red eyes and a red tail

****Medicine Cat: **Ivyfern â€" A white she-cat**

Apprentice: Dawnpaw â€" a golden tabby she-cat

****Warriors:****

Mintstorm â€" A blue she-cat

Apprentice: Tinderpaw â€" A gray tom-cat with red eyes

Bramblethorn â€" A brown tabby tom cat

Apprentice: Patchpaw â€" A white she-cat with orange paws

Icicleclaw â€" A white she-cat with icy blue eyes

Apprentice: Marshpaw â€" A brown, gray, and black spotted

tom

Wildshiver â€" A gray she-cat

Blazeleap â€" A ginger tom

Harefur â€" A black she-cat with amber eyes

Minnowfin â€" a gray tom

Firewing â€" A red and brown tom

Moonslash â€" A gray tom

Cedarwood â€" A dark red she-cat

Blossomflight â€" A white she-cat with pink eyes

Rainwillow â€" A blue tomcat with a dark gray tail

Eagleflare â€" A red, orange tom with a black stripe on his tail

****Queens:****

Whitesoul â€" A white she-cat

Kits: Yewkit â€" a black tom, Noblekit â€" a gray she-cat

Heatherdance â€" a gray she-cat with one black paw

Kits: Flarekit â€" a ginger she-cat, Sunkit â€" a pale brown tom

****Elders:****

Twilightfeather â€" an old, black tom

Badgerclaw â€" an old, gray tom

****Stoneclan:****

****Leader: ****Shadestar (Shadepelt) â€" A black tom with white paws.

****Deputy: ****Amberflare â€" A red and brown tom with ambitious amber eyes

****Medicine Cat: ****Foggyfur â€" A white and gray tom

****Apprentice: ****Diamondpaw â€" A gray she-cat with white ear tips

****Warriors:****

Troutmist â€" A pale, light blue tom with daunting amber eyes

Apprentice: Duskpaw â€" a black tom

Applesun â€" a yellowish furred she-cat

Apprentice: Birdpaw â€" a dark brown she-cat

Smokeshine â€" a tortoiseshell tom

Apprentice: Beaverpaw â€" a brown tom

Seedflame â€" a gray and brown tom

Mossgaze â€" a white tom with amber eyes

Palejaw â€" a brown tom with a pale, light brown jaw

Stormwind â€" a gray tom

Cobblerock â€" a black tom

Rosefang â€" a white she-cat

Doeflight â€" a gray she-cat

Briarfang â€" a brown she-cat

Thistlejaw â€" a ginger tomcat with long teeth

Brookfur â€" a brown and black she-cat

****Queens: ****

Bluewish â€" a blue she-cat

Kits: Goldkit â€" a pale she-cat, Rushkit â€" a gray tom, Pearlkit
â€" a ginger tom

****Elders:****

Dawnscar â€" a black she-cat

Swanbelly â€" a white she-cat

Goosewing â€" a gray tom-cat

****Goldclan****

****Leader:**** Dawnstar (Dawnsoul) â€" A white she-cat with golden
patches

****Deputy:**** Ripplewind â€" A dark black tom-cat with red
eyes

****Medicine Cat:**** Hawkleaf â€" a gray tom cat with blue
eyes

****Apprentice:**** Timberpaw â€" a very small gray
tom

****Warriors:****

Skywing â€" a white tomcat with gray stripes on the back of his flank and vengeful amber eyes

Cloudgaze â€" a White tom with black spots

Nightstream â€" a black she-cat with three white paws

Berryblaze â€" A ginger tom with red patches on his flank

Apprentice: Rushpaw â€" a black she-cat with green eyes

Tinypelt â€" A tiny gray she-cat

Apprentice: Highpaw â€" a tall white tom cat

Goldenfur â€" a pale brown she-cat with a black paw

Apprentice: Soaringpaw â€" a white she-cat with a scar on her muzzle

Antwhisker â€" a black tomcat with short whiskers

Longleg â€" a tall, long legged gray tom cat

Snowflower â€" A white she-cat with a black patch on her forehead

Dunepelt â€" A pale gray tom with a red paw

Waterwave â€" a blue gray she-cat

Diamondfur â€" a white tom

****Queens:****

Twinfeather â€" a Light brown she cat

Lightray â€" a gray she-cat

****Elders:****

Mudshard â€" a dark brown tom

Sunwhisker â€" an orange she-cat

Braveclaw â€" a black tom with long razor claws

2. Chapter 1

****Chapter 1****

"Gotcha!" A bundle of autumn leaves swirled as a spotted orange and light brown tom leaped onto a scurrying mouse. The small rodent breathed its last breath of life as he picked it up by its tail into his jaws. "That makes 3 mice and a vole. Today was a successful hunt, am I right, Grayvine?" The tom meowed to his fellow clanmate, a gray tom which stood nearby.

"Superb job as always, Autumnwind. I've still got ways to go before I catch up to you." Grayvine replied. "Perhaps we should head back to camp. The gathering is tonight, and I'm sure Redstar has a few things to announce."

"Oh, right. The full moon is tonight, isn't it? That'll be fun," Autumnwind sarcastically meowed. "It seems like recently tensions between the clans is at an all-time high. I really hope there won't be another feud. Knowing Riverstar and Shadestar, there's bound to be some kind of conflict."

"Yeahâ€¦" Grayvine sighed. "The best thing we can do is try to avoid that and follow Redstar's lead. He's usually the neutral one out of the four leaders, yes?"

"That's our leader for you! The only rational one in the lot! Now, let's not wait for the sun to fall before we start heading back." Autumnwind and Grayvine sprinted off back to camp together. Along the way, they ran into the sleek blue-furred Mistyfur.

"Greetings. Is your hunt going well?" She meowed.

"Autumnwind is on fire today. Look at his catch!" Grayvine boasted.

"Impressive as always! A great asset to our clan. I'm sure our clanmates will be pleased!" Mistyfur flicked her tail playfully. "Now then, I need to get back to my border patrol. I'll see you later!" She waved her tail politely as she wandered off into the distance.

"See ya'" Autumnwind called before trekking back to his camp. Up ahead, lie the Rainclan camp. It was surrounded by a mixture of small stony mountain rocks. As Autumnwind padded in, he could see the busy clearing ahead. His clanmates were mostly centered around the clearing, sharing tongues and sunbathing. In the back of the camp was a gigantic yew tree, with a giant hole at its base. Inside was Redstar's den. To the right of him was a large stony cliff with a thin and weak waterfall streaming down the stony wall into a very small pond. From a small cave on the cliff to the right of the falls came a ginger tom; it was Firesoul, the Medicine Cat apprentice.

"Oh, Autumnwind!" He padded towards Autumnwind, inspecting his shoulder. "It looks like your shoulder is getting better. Are you still feeling any pain?" He asked. Autumnwind shook his head. A few sunrises ago, he had injured it in a fight with a stray badger. But the scars had mostly healed and the pain from the wound had finally gone away.

"That's good to hear." Firesoul meowed. "Let me know if you have any pains. And try not to exercise it too much!" he flicked his tail politely and headed out of the camp, probably to gather herbs. Autumnwind went to the clearing to drop off his fresh kill.

"Keep up the good work! The clan needs food, especially since leafbare is coming up soon," his leader Redstar was padding to him. Autumnwind dipped his head in greeting.

"Thank you," he meowed to his leader. "Do we ever know how hard it is

for prey to run in leafbare." Redstar sat down with a sigh.

"Is something the matter?" Fawnshine, Redstar's mate mewed padding over to the two cats. She sat down, her white and gray fur glistening in the sunlight.

"It's the gathering. I'm worried that there's going to be problems. Tensions have been getting high lately," Redstar replied.

"Yeah, you know how Riverstar is," Fawnshine purred. "He's more troublesome than he's worth." Autumnwind nodded his head in agreement. Riverstar, the leader of Silverclan, was known for his cunning nature. Every so often he'd make demands or requests of the other leaders at gatherings, almost always resulting in an argument. No one could doubt his loyalty to his clan, but sometimes it felt like his clan was the only thing important to him.

"I'd like to see him demand land from us," Emeraldclaw meowed, chewing on a vole a few taillengths away. "I'll shred their fur off for even thinking they're worthy enough to ask us for anything."

"Now now, Emeraldclaw. We don't need to be marching into battles, here," Redstar warned. Emeraldclaw merely grunted. Autumnwind rolled his eyes. _Why is Emeraldclaw always jumping at every opportunity for conflict?_

"I just don't see how-" Emeraldclaw's reply was cut short by the yowl of a cat rushing into the camp. It was Dewstone.

"Our patrol has gotten into a fight on the Silverclan border!" He yowled. Calmly, Redstar rushed over to him.

"Tell me everything!" He demanded.

"Silverclan has been hunting in our territory! At least, their scent was there," his words came out between quick pants. "Lunarpelt started taunting us, and then— And then Owltone who was leading the patrol demanded an attack on them!" Redstar's expression turned dark.

"Quick! Stormfall, lead a patrol to back them up! Take Emeraldclaw, Autumnwind, Grayvine, and Spottedfur with you!" Redstar ordered, beckoning them with his tail. Spottedfur's apprentice, Steampaw came rushing up to them.

"Can I come too?" He pleaded. Autumnwind felt sympathy for the young cat. He had just been made and apprentice, and hasn't had many missions as of yet.

"Since you're Spottedfur's apprentice, you may go. We can't waste time though! I'll stay here with the camp. Be safe, Stormfall," Redstar meowed. Steampaw's eyes were filled with relief and excitement. Stormfall, the clan deputy, nodded to his leader.

"Very well. We leave at once!" He commanded. Autumnwind got to his paws and raced after his deputy. The others who were on the patrol followed suit.

Autumnwind panted as he raced behind Stormfall, trying to ignore any

pains he felt in his shoulder. Spottedfur growled beside him.
"Silverclanâ€¦ they're always causing some kind of trouble."

"Are we going to go into a battle? This is my first one!" Steampaw squealed.

"Now there. No reason to act like a kit over this. This is a very important mission to rescue our clanmates caught in a scuffle." Spottedfur was stern but fair. Steampaw reluctantly nodded. Autumnwind felt sympathy for him, as he remembered the excitement of his first warrior mission. Up ahead, battle cries could be heard. They were approaching the Silverclan border. Ahead, cats were already tackling each other in deep battle. He spotted Owlton who was bleeding massively from his flank, getting pinned down by Lunarpelt, the Silverclan deputy.

"Get off, fleabag!" Autumnwind cried as he tackled Lunarpelt away. She yelped in surprise and turned to face him with angry but confident eyes. Autumnwind shivered. Lunarpelt was among the best fighters in all of the clans. If he wasn't careful, he could end up with a deep wound.

"You picked the wrong cat to mess with. Care to eat those words?" Lunarpelt hissed, launching herself at him. Autumnwind dashed to the side to avoid her and jumped over to her, aiming a claw at her muzzle. She ducked and bashed him with her skull upwards, throwing him off balance. She then quickly slashed at him, piercing his wounded shoulder with her claw. Autumnwind cursed at the pain. Lunarpelt then tackled him and pinned him to the ground. Autumnwind yelped out in dismay, hoping a clanmate would hear him. All around him he could see various cat pelts flurrying around in battle. Emeraldclaw was standing still, staring at him, but seemingly reluctant to act.

"What are you doing, mouse brain! Help me!" Autumnwind hissed. Emeraldclaw looked at him apologetically and ran over to attack another cat. Suddenly, a flash of gray fur caught Autumnwind's eye and Lunarpelt was knocked off him. _Grayvine!_

"Don't worry. I've got your back!" His friend turned to look at him before facing the Silverclan deputy.

"Thank you." Autumnwind panted. He knew he wasn't in any shape to fight but he didn't want to retreat when Lunarpelt was still ready to attack. However, she did not attack. Autumnwind then realized that the Silverclan cats were starting to fall back, being heavily outnumbered.

"Consider yourself lucky. I would have done a number on you." Lunarpelt hissed. "Silverclan, retreat!" She darted away, her wounded clanmates following her.

"And don't come back!" Grayvine triumphantly yowled.

"Are you okay?" Stormfall prodded Autumnwind. "You should get that looked at by Whistleleaf or Firesoul." His deputy urged.

"I will as soon as we get back. Owâ€¦ she just HAD to attack the wounded shoulderâ€¦" Autumnwind winced. _Of all the cats, Lunarpelt's wounds always hurt the most._

As they walked back to camp, Autumnwind noticed Emeraldclaw was at the back of the patrol. He slowed his pace so he could be in range to talk to him one on one. "Mousebrain!" He hissed. Emeraldclaw glared at him for that remark.

"What!?" Emeraldclaw's white pelt was stained with tiny splats of blood, but they weren't his.

"You didn't help me! You just stood there while I was pinned down!" Autumnwind growled. Emeraldclaw looked shocked at first, but regained his composure.

"What are you talking about!? Are you trying to pick a fight or something!?" Emeraldclaw paced ahead, refusing to look at Autumnwind. "Sâ€|sorry, okay? N-now keep out of my fur!" Emeraldclaw muttered before he was out of speaking range. _How odd. It's not like him to apologize for anything._

Emeraldclaw was the trouble maker in the clan. Well, trouble maker was an understatement. He was always causing fights within the clan. And he has been caught bullying newer clanmates on many occasions. Apprentices fear him. He is a rebel with a temper. As such, he didn't seem to have many friends outside of a few loyal lackies who did everything he told them to. Still though, he was in no way _not_ loyal to his clan. He would have saved Autumnwind in a heartbeat as with any other clanmate if the situation called for it, so it was odd that he just stood still while Autumnwind was pinned down. _I wonder what's up with him today?_ Autumnwind sighed.

3. Chapter 2

Chapter 2

The loud meowing of furious cats filled the air as Redstar climbed to the top of a branch on the great Yew tree. Emeraldclaw sensed Autumnwind glaring at him from across the camp. _What!? Are you still mad about that? Grow a spine and get over it, birdbrain!_

"Let all cats old enough to catch their own prey gather beneath the Yew tree for a clan meeting!" Redstar called. "I wonder what our leader has to say about all thisâ€|" Lionleap meowed, taking a spot next to Emeraldclaw. But Emeraldclaw didn't respond with anything other than a tiny grunt of acknowledgement. Lionleap was about to say more but quickly hushed himself. _Heh, they know not to bother me when I'm in a bad mood._

"As you all knowâ€|" Redstar started. "We were attacked by Silverclan on the border. Lunarpetal herself was leading the patrol, and one of our warriors, Owlton, has been heavily injured by the conflict. I'd like to thank our fellow emergency patrol for rescuing our troubled clanmates in their time of need." Yowls of approval rose through the crowd.

"However, as you may know. Tonight is the night of the gathering. That means that Riverstar is most definitely going to bring this up at the meetingâ€|" Redstar continued. "This in mind, I want to ask everyone not to get angry or riled up when he does. We're not here to start any more conflicts." Emeraldclaw rolled his eyes. _If any cat

gets in my way, I'll shred them to mouse bits. _

"Anyway, that's all I had to say. Stormfall will come around and appoint people to go to the gathering. We'll depart at sunfall!" Redstar dismissed the clan with a swing of his tail as cats started going back to normal routine.

"Hey Emeraldclaw. Gathering tonight. Oh, and you too Lionleap!" Stormfall simply called.

"Got it!" Emeraldclaw replied. Lionleap silently dipped his head in acknowledgement. It was no question that Emeraldclaw would be admitted to the gathering, as he was one of the best fighters in the clan. He felt oddly powerful.

Emeraldclaw's mood began to gradually increase as the day went on. He loved gatherings. He really didn't care much for his clanmates, but special cats would always be at the gatherings. Those he considered his true friends. _I'll get to see them again!_ He smiled.

"Woah! It's weird to see _you_ in a happy mood!" Leafshine teased as she padded up beside him.

"What? Is it weird to be happy once in a while?" He grunted.

"Hey, hey, keep your fur on. I was just joking," she purred. "I'll see you around." She flicked his whiskers with her tail before padding away towards the fresh kill pile. _She thinks she's so cute with her antics._ Emeraldclaw suspected she had a crush on him. Or rather, it was seemingly obvious. But he didn't care either way. She wasn't interesting enough for his concern.

"Alright everyone! Are you ready? It's time for the gathering!" Stormfall called from the middle of the camp. Emeraldclaw looked up and realized that the night was already starting to begin. _Time goes by so fast, huh?_ Emeraldclaw took his place in the line of cats and started heading out. Redstar took the lead, followed by Stormfall. Whistleleaf, the clan's medicine cat, and her apprentice Firesoul, were just behind them.

As they continued trekking towards the Noble Stones, Emeraldclaw caught scent of Silverclan. He bristled as the Silverclan cats ahead glared at them with vicious eyes. "Don't pay them any mind" Stormfall's voice caught his ear as he noticed his deputy has slowed his pace a bit to stand by him. Surprisingly, Emeraldclaw didn't feel the need to argue.

"Sure thing," Emeraldclaw meowed, as he scanned the Silverclan cats for a particular feline. By the time they had entered the stony hollow, Goldclan and Stoneclan were already there. Rainclan had been the last to arrive after Silverclan. Despite all the tensions in the air, Emeraldclaw wasn't fazed by it. He rushed forward into the crowd of clan-mixed felines. He was so distracted that he didn't even immediately realize it when a cat bumped into his side.

"S-sorry," the other cat replied. It was a slender white tom with Goldclan scent. _Get outta my way!_ Emeraldclaw hissed and shoved him aside, heading towards the deputy's area. Ahead were the four deputies of the clans. Stormfall from Rainclan, Ripplewind from Goldclan, and of course—

"Lunarpelt! Amberflare!" Emeraldclaw called in greeting. The two he had named left their station for a bit to greet him. As Lunarpelt approached, her beautiful silver pelt glowed in the moonlight, while the brown and black haired tom, Amberflare, followed.

"Hi Emeraldclaw!" Lunarpelt purred and rubbed her cheek against his. Amberflare also gave a purr in greeting. Lunarpelt and Amberflare were the only two cats Emeraldclaw really cared about.

"I'm so happy to see you guys! I was waiting all day for this gathering!" Emeraldclaw purred.

"That's all well and good but, remember, we are in different clans soâ€¦" Amberflare meowed.

"Argh, you always do that Amberflare. Lighten up a bit!" Emeraldclaw gave Amberflare a friendly nudge. It was true though. His two best friends were of different clan. And they were the deputies none the less. But Emeraldclaw didn't really mind. "To me, you two will always be clanmates!"

"Oh, you never change. But you should try maybe getting along with your own clanmates. You know you have a terrible reputation in your clan," Lunarpelt commented. "I always hear your clanmates complain about you at gatherings." For a second Emeraldclaw bristled, but then took a deep breath and let his fur fall flat. Who cares what my stupid clanmates think of me? They should know I'm a better fighter and hunter than all of them!

"Their pathetic plights don't interest me!" Emeraldclaw simply grunted.

"Alsoâ€¦. I'm sorry about the whole border skirmish that happened earlierâ€¦" Lunarpelt meowed. "I can sometimes lose my cool a bit." Oh yeah! I forgot about that whole thing. Why did it start in the first place, again?

"It's okay. Riverstar, your amazingly tactful leader, will find a way to twist the story around to where it was Rainclan's fault, I'm sure" Amberflare let out a sarcastic mrow of amusement.

"Hey there! I don't need any of that from you!" Lunarpelt retorted, but not angrily. "By the way. How is your clan doing? I heard that your clanmates were pretty annoyed when you were appointed deputy." Amberflare hung his head and sighed.

"I'm working on that. It's honestly annoying. They all wanted Troustmist to be the deputy, because he's so cool and strong and all that. But just because he's been a warrior way longer than me doesn't mean I'm not capable," Amberflare meowed, pride starting to come back to his chest. Emeraldclaw felt pity for him. From what he heard last gathering, Stoneclan cats were disobeying Amberflare's orders intentionally and not listening to him despite the orders of their leader. Man, Stoneclan really isn't in good shape right now. I'm glad my clan isn't like thatâ€¦!

But he could hardly blame Stoneclan cats for how they acted. Their leader Shadestar had a pretty dark past. Many moons ago, he had apparently almost taken over the whole forest when he tried to

conquer the other clans. His ideology was to help his own clan while ignoring the needs of the others. Emeraldclaw thought it was a miracle that such a leader could remain clan leader. From what he heard, Shadestar tried to walk the road to redemption after a huge war had erupted and tried to re-earn his respect amongst the clans. And while most cats forgave him, no one ever forgot his past deeds. Shadestar had been known to become very quiet and subdued since then.

"Well if it's any consolation, I think you're an amazing deputy!" Emeraldclaw purred.

"Hey, what about me!?" Lunarpelt remarked. "I've been a deputy much longer. And all clans fear my amazing, talented battle skills!" It was true. Lunarpelt was probably the strongest fighter in all the clans. Emeraldclaw has seen her fight many times on the battlefield. She's swift, reads her opponents well, and her moves are so elegant it's almost like a battle dance. Emeraldclaw sighed as he remembered the fight that happened earlier. He didn't wanna help Autumnwind because it would have required him to fight Lunarpelt, who he considered a best friend.

"Alright. Without further ado! Let's begin the gathering!" Dawnstar's voice rang out above all. All four clan leaders were perched on a giant stone that was in the middle of the clearing. The stone reflected the light of the full moon brilliantly, which is why this place was called Noble Stones. "Goldclan is doing quite wellâ€" she began. Emeraldclaw ignored most of what she said, since the usual speeches at the gathering were just the same old speeches about how the clan has good prey, new apprentices, etc. What he, and most of the cats, were waiting for was the inevitable drama that would be brought about by Silverclan's leader, Riverstar. "And we hope that the prey runs just as well during the upcoming leafbare!" Dawnstar finished, taking a step back. Next in line was Shadestar.

"S-stoneclan is doing fine as well. We've recently driven a small nest of foxes from our territoryâ€" We also have two new apprenticesâ€".Duskpaw and Birdpawâ€" Shadestar commented. His voice was very shaky and subdued as always.

"Birdpaw! Duskpaw! Birdpaw! Duskpaw!" The crowd of cats in the gathering yelled their name. Emeraldclaw looked over to the Stoneclan cats to see two young cats holding their heads up with pride. _That must be the new apprentices_.

"â€"and that's all I have to reportâ€" Shadestar silently walked to the back without meeting the gaze of the cats below him. Riverstar was about to step forward until Redstar immediately rushed forward.

"As for Rainclan!" Redstar began. Riverstar shot him an annoyed glance. "Our prey has been running well. We've recently found a new source of catmint, leaving us well prepared for the coming leafbare." At that comment, Whistleleaf and Firesoul seemed pleased. As much as Emeraldclaw didn't care for his clanmates, he had to admit, these two were a great asset to Rainclan, and among very few he really respected.

"Yeah, yeahâ€" that's great and all. Now when do _I_ get to speak!"

Riverstar sarcastically meowed. Emeraldclaw rolled his eyes. _Here we go againâ€|_

"I was just finishing my report. Feel free to take over from here." Redstar impressively didn't seem bothered by Riverstar's remark, and stepped back to let the Silverclan leader speak. _Time for him to bring up that stupid border scuffle. _Emeraldclaw sighed.

"For many years, our clan has flourished in the rich gift that Starclan bestowed upon us. That gift is the gift of water, which is a gift of life! However, despite the usual stormy climate of our forest, we've been lacking rain recently." Riverstar began.

"Therefore, our clan has gotten very parched and have a request for our dear friends of Stoneclan!" At that comment, Amberflare seemed visibly distressed. _What? What does Stoneclan have to do with anything!?!_

"What are you going on about now!?" A stray voice yelled from the audience. Emeraldclaw couldn't tell which clan that comment came from. He assumed it was from Stoneclan, though.

"Now, now there. Please hear my plea. Shadestar, I ask of thee to bestow upon us the Glittering Springs!" Riverstar meowed. Shadestar sighed.

"I understand your plight. But all of our clans are thirsty. The river that borders you with Rainclan should be enough to suffice, shouldn't it? And don't forget, your clan camp _borders_ a lake shore," Shadestar calmly replied.

"In ancient times, the spring used to belong to us. Shouldn't it right that we reobtain access to such a valuable asset to our clan? After all, it was your ancestors that greedily stole the springs from our clan," Riverstar commented.

"That was then, not now. Our clan has no desire to steal anything from you," Shadestar remarked.

"I bet you'd know all about stealing wouldn't you Shadestar! Especially when it comes to territory!" The voice came from a Silverclan cat. Shadestar bristled. Emeraldclaw sighed. Bringing up Shadestar's past was the easiest way to make him angry.

"Urgh! That's enough! I'm not stealing _anything_! That's ridiculous. The territory is _ours!_ You got that, Silverclan fleabags! If you want the springs from us, then fight us for it. Is that clear, Riverstar?" Shadestar's usual timid nature seemed to have made a complete 180. _I guess no matter how good someone becomes, they never really lose their old temper._

But Riverstar didn't seem upset. He simply smirked. "You'll regret those words, Shadestar. You'll regret themâ€|." He flicked his tail at Shadestar before jumping down the stones. "Alright, Silverclan, let's head back. This gathering is as good as done." Riverstar slowly led his clan out of the gathering spot.

"Hey, sorry. But that includes me. I gotta go nowâ€|." Lunarpelt meowed as she passed Emeraldclaw. Amberflare was standing beside her.

"Of course. Wanna meet later tonight here? The three of us?" Emeraldclaw said in a hushed voice. Amberflare and Lunarpelt looked at each other for a second, before reluctantly nodding.

"Fineâ€¦ but be careful. I'm not going to be caught meeting other clanmates. You _know_ Troutmist will use that as ammo against me," Amberflare commented, turning away and heading towards the leaving Stoneclan cats. Lunarpelt whisked his ear with her tail before heading out also. Emeraldclaw smiled. _These cats really are the only ones that matter to meâ€¦_

4. Chapter 3

Chapter 3

"Riverstar, are you really sure that was a good idea? The river that borders Rainclan is still pretty large. We have more than enough water to last us." Lunarpelt asked as she walked beside Riverstar in leading the Silverclan cats back to the camp. _Seriously though. What if there had been a physical fight at the gathering? _

"Oh Lunar. It's not just about the water. Don't forget. That spring is a valuable source of fish as well. Prey is definitely an important asset to leafbare. And besides, don't you think Stoneclan's territory is a little big compared to every other clan territory?" Riverstar remarked. It was true. Stoneclan always had the largest territory out of all the clans. The fact that they had the Glittering Springs meant that their clan had way more resources than they needed.

"So what do you plan to do? Are weâ€¦. are we going to war with them?" Lunarpelt asked. She gulped down a sense of dread as she said that. Despite the fact that she was a capable fighter, she still hated needless bloodshed. _I already know the answer to this question though, don't I?_

"I'm not going to beat around any bushes. The answer is yes." Riverstar replied. A few of the clanmates that were walking around them purred with agreement. Lunarpelt sighed. It seemed as if cats were always jumping at every opportunity to fight against each other. _I suppose that's just how rivalry is, isn't it?_ "I know you're concerned Lunar. But trust me on this. I know what I'm doing. I won't let any of our cats die. I just want to scare Stoneclan. I love my clan. All of you are like family to me."

"That's good to hear," Lunarpelt purred. _I guess having the springs would be very beneficial to us. Stoneclan doesn't really need it anyway, do they?_

"So tomorrow at sunrise, we'll march our troops over to the spring and surround it, marking the territory along the way. I'm curious to see if Shadestar cares enough to cause potential bloodshed over a part of his territory he doesn't even really need. If he's too prideful, then we'll just have to fight," Riverstar explained. "I have a good feeling about this though. I think our chance of victory is pretty high." Lunarpelt felt relieved by this. Although he was a bit of a go getter at times, Riverstar was very smart. He was a natural tactician, and if he truly believed in a good outcome, chances are, things would go well.

"Looks like we're almost there," Shadowtail meowed as their camp was in sight. Lunarpelt stifled a yawn. Although she was tired, she still needed to meet up with Emeraldclaw and Amberflare at the Noble Stones tonight. That was their usual meeting place. Every once in a while they would meet there after a gathering to reminisce old times.

Although many moons had passed, Lunarpelt never forgot the time when she, Emeraldclaw, and Amberflare were all clanmates. Once upon a time, they were clanmates in a faraway clan called Blueclan. However, after an accident, they ended up in this forest, split apart in three different clans. It all seemed to happen yesterday. The cliff, the river, and then Riverstar finding her at the riverbank when she woke up unconscious. They were still new apprentices when this happened, and ended up being raised in their own respective clans instead of reuniting in the same clan. Although Lunarpelt secretly wished they were a part of Silverclan, she didn't sway in her loyalty to her clan. She was still a Silverclan cat at heart. Riverstar had done so much for her, and she wanted to repay his and the clan's kindness. Eventually, working her way up to deputy, she hoped that she would become a good leader someday.

"Brrâ€¦. Why does it have to be so cold nowadaysâ€¦" Lunarpelt growled to herself as the cold air of the night hit her fur. She was heading towards Noble Stones. All of her clan was asleep at this time, so she left, telling Minnowfin that she was going for a "nightly hunt" when questioned at the clan entrance. Despite her loyalty to her clan, Lunarpelt still felt a tang of guilt whenever she went to meet Emeraldclaw and Amberflare. _I'm not betraying my clan am I? I'm their deputy thoughâ€¦. What am I doing?_

Lunarpelt considered turning back, but when imagining the look of disappointment on Emeraldclaw's face, she kept moving forward. _He's always so happy to see me. They both are._ As she neared the gathering spot, she could see Emeraldclaw's beautiful white fur glowing in the moonlight. He turned his head to face her with his glittering green eyes. "You came! Amberflare should be here soon!" He called.

"Quiet, remember? We don't want any cat to hear us." Lunarpelt meowed.

"Oh come on! No one's going to be out this late!" Emeraldclaw retorted. He purred as she arrived at the giant stone that the leaders usually spoke on. "I'm glad you came. Honestlyâ€¦"

"Howdy, lovebirds," Amberflare called as he padded into the clearing.

"Seriously, Amberflare? Enough with the jokes!" Emeraldclaw hissed.

"Relax, relax. I'm just blowing off some steam. My clanmates were being a pain in the fur again," he sighed.

"You two should trade clans. Amber's cool and gentle nature would go well with Rainclan. And Emeraldclaw's temper and abrasiveness would work perfectly in Stoneclan," Lunarpelt mused. Emeraldclaw purred in amusement.

"In all seriousness though. Sorry aboutâ€¦ Riverstar," Lunarpelt mewed.

"It's fine. I'm honestly surprised he didn't mention the scuffle that you guys had with Rainclan," Amberflare responded.

"You knew about that?" Emeraldclaw gasped.

"Lunarpelt mentioned it earlier at the gathering, remember?" Amberflare commented. "Anyway. Is your clan planning on taking any action?"

"Amberflare, I'm not going to make any comments," Lunarpelt gazed at him sternly.

"I take that as a yes then," Amberflare sighed. "This whole thing is honestly really mouse brained."

"To our defense. Stoneclan honestly has way too much territory already. I think Shadestar could afford to offer us the springs. Maybe you can convince him to deal with this matter peacefully," Lunarpelt pleaded.

"You know how my clan is. We're the aggressive bunch of the lot. Shadestar is kind at heart, despite his old days. But the clan cats won't want to resolve things peacefully. We've always had this fighting spirit to us," Amberflare commented.

"You and Shadestar should really discipline your clan," Emeraldclaw remarked.

"You should really discipline yourself! You don't even have any friends in your own clan do you!?" Amberflare bristled. Emeraldclaw's eyes widened as he was taken aback. "Sorry. I shoudn't be taking my anger out on you. It's just, Shadestar really tries his best. He wants to show all the clans that he's a kind hearted leader."

"Hasn't he already? He's helped out the clans numerous times. I remember when he used to donate supplies to the other clans every moon back in the day," Lunarpelt meowed.

"Cats don't forget these kinds of things. I agree with you. Shadestar really is a good cat now. Even if I wasn't around when the Great War happened. I think his past still haunts him even today," Amberflare sighed. "Anyway, I should probably get going back to my clan. Whatever happens tomorrow, I'm sorry in advance."

"If we happen to fight, I'll be giving it my all," Lunarpelt meowed. Emeraldclaw seemed distressed at her reply. He doesn't realize the importance of clan division. Amber and I are deputies now. We have to give our utmost loyalty to our clans.

"I'll head back as well. Goodbye Emeraldclaw," Lunarpelt brushed against Emeraldclaw before walking out of the clearing. She looked back once to see his eyes watching her as she departed. Lunarpelt sighed. I really want him to make friends in his own clan. We need to move on from Blueclan. Those days are gone.

Despite that, Lunarpelt didn't want to stop having these meetings.

Why did we have to end up on different sides of the river?

5. Chapter 4

****Chapter 4****

"You stole my prey, Fox-brain!"

"No! You were too slow to catch it! It just shows how much of a TERRIBLE hunter you are!"

"Do you wanna feel my claws, flea-bag!"

"Try me!"

The yelling of two cats was audible throughout the whole Stoneclan camp as a hunting patrol had just returned. _Seedflame and Moss gaze are fighting again!_ Amberflare ran over to the two cats who were bristling and growling at each other. "Stop this right now! Both of you," Amberflare hissed. But neither of the cats acknowledged his presence.

"You're always acting all high and mighty yet you can't even catch a simple mouse!"

"Says the one who ran away from a fox the other day while the _rest of us_ chased it off!"

Amberflare bristled. These cats weren't listening to him. "As your _deputy_ I command you to stop!" Amberflare pushed his way in between the two cats. Seedflare shoved Amberflare away and locked gazes with Moss gaze. _I swear to Starclan!_

"That's enough! Can it, you two!" Troustmist's voice echoed through the clearing. The light blue tabby tom looked at the two fighting cats, his eyes filled with a threatening spark. The two cats flattened their ears in fear and walked separate ways from each other. The fight was over. Amberflare felt anger welling up inside of him. "You're welcome," Troustmist meowed padding up to Amberflare. "It's a shame they won't even listen to their deputy but will listen to just an _ordinary warrior_ just like them. If only I was the deputy." Troutmist smirked.

"Get over it already! I was chosen! NOT _you_!" Amberflare hissed.

"There, there now little kitten. It's not nice for our deputy to be acting that way," Troustmist teased.

"I swear to Starclan you better stop before I- noâ€¦ you're not worth it," Amberflare walked away in fear that he might physically attack Troustmist. If he did that, then he'd be scolded by Shadestar. He sighed and walked out of the camp and into the rocky path down the mountain, relishing the peace and quiet. _Heh, they don't need me. If they fight again, then stupid Troustmist can stop them!_ _Eventually, he reached the foot of the mountain and stepped onto the grasslands.

Amberflare felt very distressed. _Why doesn't my clan ever listen to

me? Do they not like me? When did I ever wrong them!? It's not fair!_ Agonizing thoughts pierced his mind over and over until a tail of another cat brushed his flank.

"Do you know why I made you my deputy?" It was Shadestar's voice. Amberflare turned to look at his leader. But Amberflare didn't have the words to reply. Shadestar sighed. "Then I'll continue. Troustmist could never be my deputy."

"Why!? The other cats just _adore_ him! They listen to everything he says, but not me!"

"Give them time. I'm sure they'll open up to you once they adjust to your new position," Shadestar assured. _I'm not buying that!_ And then it hit him. Why didn't they like him? He had always been so caring for his clan. He was cool and collected as Shadestar had described. A shiver went down Amberflare's spine. _Is it because of...?_

"Blueclanâ€¦. This is about _Blueclan_ isn't it!?" Amberflare's claws dug into the earth beneath him. Shadestar did not reply. _You're not saying anything because you know it's true!_ "It's unfair, you know!? Ever since I was an apprentice I have served this clan well. I shouldn't _have_ to be of Stoneclan blood to lead this clan someday. I get it. Troutmist thinks he is above me. He's a Stoneclan blooded warrior and is a few moons older than me. But I was the one who was chosen!"

"Indeed you were," Shadestar mewed. "And Troustmist is going to have to get over that. Now come on, let's get back to camp." Shadestar jumped back into the rocky path and began trekking up the mountain cliff. Amberflare followed. _Stoneclan may not be in the best of state right now, but, I promise I will make it better!_

As soon as they arrived into the camp, Amberflare heard a voice calling from behind. "Report! Everyone!" Stormwind barged into the camp between Shadestar and Amberflare in a panicked flurry. "Itâ€¦ It's Silverclan!" At the mention of Silverclan, Amberflare bristled. _Urghâ€¦ Riverstar!_

"Is it the spring!?" Shadestar asked instantly. Stormwind bristled.

"Yes. They've surrounded it, and brought many warriors with them. Riverstar is there along with Lunarpelt," Stormwind replied in between quick pants. _Lunarpeltâ€¦!_

"Then we can't bide our time! Quick! I want you, Amberflare, Troustmist, Seedflame, Moss gaze, Applesun, Doe flight, Cobblerock, Rosefang, and Brookfur to come! Everyone else guard the camp!" Shadestar commanded. The cats in question quickly ran up to them. Shadestar flicked his tail to gesture that they would depart. He dashed down the mountain path as the rest of the cats followed.

"I can't believe Riverstar was seriousâ€¦!" Amberflare meowed, racing beside his leader.

"He's _always_ serious! So troublesome!" Shadestar's eyes conveyed a distinct fury. _I can tell they've had quite a rivalry in the past.

"How many cats did they bring, Stormwind? You said that he brought 'many warriors'," Amberflare asked. Stormwind looked down.

"I didn't count. But I think he brought most of his warriors," Stormwind replied. _Perhapsâ€|_

"Maybe we can go for their camp, and teach them a lesson," Troustmist suggested before Amberflare could say anything. _It would be a good opportunity after allâ€|_

"No! We're not like that! We're only here to defend our territory!" Shadestar snapped, his eyes displaying a slight horror. "Iâ€|I'm not here to attack or take territories from other clans after all. The spring is _our _territory, and we're going to _drive _them out of _our _territory!" _Phew, glad Troutmist spoke up before I did. _And then it hit him. _Riverstar _knows_ that Shadestar wouldn't morally want to attack his camp, so he knows that he could safely bring most of his warriors over to the spring. This might turn out to be a tough fight!_ Amberflare could feel anxiety running down his spine. He could already smell the Silverclan cats that were ahead but out of sight. They eventually reached the Pine Forest, which was a little ways off of the spring.

Shadestar stopped at the edge of the forest. Amberflare guessed he wanted to get a view of Silverclan's force before they charged out in the open towards battle. Right now they were still shielded by the shadows of the pine trees. Although Amberflare guessed their scent was noticeable. Amberflare peeked around a tree. Riverstar was directly in front of the spring. Lunarpelt was standing beside them. He could make out other various warriors and even apprentices lined up in front of the two commanders. _It's as I had feared. He brought his whole force. We _really _should have just gone for the camp.

—

"We have no choice but to go for itâ€|" Shadestar sighed. Amberflare could tell he was trying to hide the slight tremble in his legs. "S-Stoneclan! Attack!" At that command, every Stoneclan cat on the patrol ran ahead. Amberflare could see Riverstar smirking from afar. _He wanted this to happen!_ Cats began tackling each other in battle fury! Amberflare jumped on a ginger tom who he recognized to be Blazeleap.

"Get lost, musky Silverclan warrior!" Amberflare growled, pinning the tom down.

"I wouldn't dream of it!" Blazeleap kicked Amberflare with sheathed hindclaws, causing Amberflare to bleed slightly on his belly. _Urgh!_ Amberflare was forced to jump off of the Silverclan cat. Blazeleap readied a jump but Amberflare dodged it by jumping to the side. He then quickly jumped back at Blazeleap before the cat could unleash another attack. He gripped Blazeleap's neck with his teeth and bit down, but not too hard. Blazeleap yelped at the pain as blood splattered on both of them. Amberflare let go and stood back. The Silverclan Warrior wasn't in any immediate life threatening danger from his wound, but he was wounded enough so that he wouldn't want to fight back. Suddenly, there was a flash of gray fur as Lunarpelt jumped in front of Blazeleap.

"Retreat, Blazeleap. I'll take care of this," Lunarpelt growled.

Blazeleap nodded his thanks and ran off. Amberflare let out a sigh. _I knew this was coming._ "I told you last night, didn't I? I'll hold nothing back!"

"I wouldn't expect anything less, Silverclan deputy!" Amberflare jumped at his opponent, aiming an unsheathed claw at her. She jumped backwards, before charging ahead with her own claws. Amberflare readied his claws as well and slashed forward. He felt claws piercing down his flank as Lunarpelt managed to land her blow. However, he had also landed his blow. Both cats now faced away from each other as they landed. Amberflare turned around to see Lunarpelt turning towards him. There was blood on her flank, but not that much. _I only barely scratched her!_ On the other hand, his flank was bleeding a bit more, and he winced from the pain. He jumped back and quickly scanned the battlefield. Shadestar was slashing at Riverstar, who jumped over him. Troustmist was fighting a brown Silverclan tom. Stormwind and Moss gaze were teaming up against two Silverclan warriors. Fur and blood littered the ground as this violent conflict continued.

"Don't take your eyes off your opponent! You don't have time to worry about your clanmates in battle!" Lunarpelt called. Amberflare looked forward to see her charging towards him. She bashed him directly, sending him flying back. _Oww!_ Amberflare winced, still in the air. He suddenly felt himself plunge into cold water. _She pushed me in the spring!_ He opened his eyes but could only see the blurred light of the surface. He pushed his way upward, desperately wanting a breath. His body was cold against the liquid as he pawed his way up. He kicked harshly with his hind legs to help propel him upwards. He finally managed to reach the surface and took a giant gasp upon making contact with the air again. He slowly pulled himself out of the water. The cats were still fighting. _Where's Lunarpelt!?_ He scanned the clearing to see her attacking Applesun. Shadestar was bleeding heavily from his flank, panting, muttering something to himself.

"This is getting nowhere! Stoneclan, retreat!" Shadestar called. Amberflare quickly rushed forward, towards the Pine Forest. The Silverclan cats stopped attacking them as the Stoneclan cats started retreating.

"Tch, they're showing _us_ mercy? If only we had a bigger force, _we_ would have won!" Troutmist growled. Amberflare looked back before entering the forest. Lunarpelt was staring at him with an expression he didn't understand. Riverstar on the other hand looked very pleased at Silverclan's apparent victory. _I knew we were going to lose!_

"I suppose that means the spring is theirs now. Are we going to send out a patrol later to reaffirm our scent marks?" Amberflare asked. Shadestar shook his head.

"They're probably going to send out warriors to guard the spring. I don't want any more of our cats getting hurt. Let's just go home!" Shadestar sighed, hanging his head. Amberflare could feel the disappointment and distress in his leader. This day was a victory for Silverclan, and a loss that Stoneclan would never forget. Amberflare wondered what was in store for the future. A very strong wind suddenly blew by. Amberflare shivered from the cold. He was still wet from the plunge he took. "We'd better hurry. I don't want my own deputy catching a cold," Shadestar commented.

"Iâ€¦I'll be fine," Amberflare reassured. But inside he felt unease and tension building up. _I have a bad feeling about this. I really doâ€¦_

6. Chapter 5

Chapter 5

The waves of the river ran furiously as the storm continued. Birds flew away immediately at the flash of the lightning. Skywing sat motionless, staring blankly into the river. Rainwater furiously pelted at him, but he didn't react. He was cold and unmoving. He heard the sound of rustling ahead. He looked up to see a dark figure peer out from the Royal Forest trees, which lie on the other side of the river. He didn't know what the figure was. It could be a badger, a fox, or even a bear. _Come over here, wild beast. You can eat me if you wantâ€¦_ But the creature, whatever it was, retreated back into the forest at the sound of thunder. Skywing sighed and lied down, lazily glaring back into the racing river. Wind furiously blew against his pelt, shivering him down to the spine. But he didn't care. He closed his eyes. Flashbacks of that stormy war from many, many seasons ago still haunted him. Every time it stormed, he was reminded of everything. He remembered racing through the canyon as a young apprentice, being attacked by various cats, and then seeing the white fur in the distance; the dead body of his father. _I can't give up. I need to be stronger so I can build my empire. _But Skywing was chained down by despair. Whenever he was in "this mood", he didn't want to do anything. He felt demotivated and didn't really care about anything anymore. He just wanted to be taken by the wind, to be blown away to a faraway and more interesting land. "Skywing! There you are! We were looking for you!" The voice of Snowflower sounded from behind him. He didn't bother to turn around. "Alright, if you're not coming over here, I'll just drag you back!" He could hear her pelting over to him. She then prodded him with her paw. "C'mon now. You need to get back to the _camp_!" Skywing slowly raised his head and faced her. Her white fur was very visible in the night, yet her forehead always had that black patch on it.

"I hate the rainâ€¦!" Skywing commented, glancing towards the river again. He heard what he thought was suppressed laughter from Snowflower.

"Fishbrain! If you hate rain, then why are you hanging out here when it's _storming_! Seriously, you make _no_ sense, sometimes, Skywing!" Snowflower purred, prodding at him again. "For real though, you should come back to the camp. I'll come with you." Skywing closed his eyes again, letting his memories flood back to him. He ignored Snowflower's meows as everything whirled around in his mind. _Empire. I want to create an Empire. That's what father wanted._ Suddenly, new energy surrounded Skywing. He stood up, feeling strong again. All the distressed emotions that flooded his body were temporarily gone.

"Okay! I'm feeling good again. Let's go back!" Skywing meowed, turning around and walking towards the direction of their camp.

"Feeling good again? Did you come out here to _sulk_?" Snowflower

asked. _I always open my mouth when I shouldn't! _Skywing decided not to respond. Together they walked, fighting back the wind which was blowing against them. Snowflower shivered. "Now _I'm_ all wet! I've been standing in this rain too long!" Snowflower hissed.

"Is it because of me?" Skywing asked, expressionless. Snowflower bristled in surprise.

"What? No. Don't worry about it. I would stand moons in the rain for any clanmate. It's my duty as a Goldclan warrior to help a clanmate in need!" Snowflower purred. _I wasn't really in any need though, but if it makes you feel better!_ Skywing nodded in agreement. Tomorrow he would continue his ambition, finding anyway he could to build up his own rank and power within the clan. When they reached the camp entrance, Lightray and Dawnstar were waiting.

"You found him. Where was he?" Lightray asked.

"He was by--"

"_I_ was by the river. I just needed some time to think," Skywing interrupted Snowflower's reply.

"You're so muddy and wet! Let me clean you off!" Lightray meowed. _She's making a fuss again it seems._ Lightray began to lick his flank in an attempt to get the dirt off. She had always been very protective and caring towards him and his brother, Cloudgaze. Strangely though, Skywing didn't really mind it too much.

"We're glad you're _both_ safe. The other cats in the search patrol are already back. They'll be relieved to hear that you found him, Snowflower," Dawnstar commented. _No lecture?_ Skywing followed the cats back into the camp. Since it was night, he headed for the warriors den. It was night anyway, so there wasn't much left to do for the day. He made his way to a nest that wasn't directly close to anyone else's. He didn't want to get them wet with his rainy pelt. He curled up and closed his eyes, letting sleep take over him.

The light of the dawn awoke Skywing. Morning had arrived. He gave himself a quick stretch before sitting up. His pelt was no longer wet, but it was still kind of dirty from last night. He began to groom himself, listening towards the clearing. "Did you hear? Silverclan had a fight with Stoneclan yesterday! Moss gaze told me at the border today. Apparently they completely stole the springs!"

"Yeah! I guess Stoneclan is too weak to defend their own territory. Perhaps _we_ should attack them and steal some of their territory. Shadestar will probably curl into a tiny ball like always since he's so soft and weak!"

"No one's invading anyone today!" Skywing recognized Dawnstar's voice. _She must have overheard them and intervened. Now I want to go see what this is all about._ Skywing stood up as soon as he was fully groomed and walked out. The sunlight greeted him with a nice warmth on his pelt. _I better savor this. Leafbare will come soon and then it will be cold every day!_ Over at the clearing, Dawnstar was sitting with Ripplewind, Berryblaze, Cloudgaze, and Snowflower.

"Oh, you're awake! Good sunrise, Skywing!" Snowflower greeted,

beckoning him over. _What a nice and convenient invitation into the gossip._ Skywing padded over to greet her, giving her a friendly brush with his flank.

"Greetings," Cloudgaze, purred. Skywing dipped his head in greeting to his brother.

"So, about that whole battle. What do you think we should do about it?" Ripplewind asked.

"Battle?" Skywing played dumb and tilted his head in a clueless manner.

"Apparently Silverclan and Stoneclan had a battle over the springs yesterday. Remember that whole thing at the gathering? Apparently they were serious about itâ€¦" Dawnstar sighed. "Seriously, I wonder how much needless blood was spilt over such an unnecessary fight."

"Well, I suppose Silverclan benefitted from it. They won after all," Ripplewind remarked.

"That's true. As for what we'll do? Nothing. It doesn't really concern us. If it was Stoneclan who invaded them, I'd be alarmed since they could potentially invade us. But Silverclan were the attackers, and we don't border them. It might be brought up in the next gathering, but that's still ways away," Dawnstar meowed. Ripplewind nodded his head in agreement. Although Skywing wasn't convinced. _He _wants _to attack Stoneclan. Perhaps he wants more territory for Goldclan. We _are _the smallest territory after all. Hmmâ€¦ if only Stoneclan were the attackers. Would Dawnstar be willing to go to war? _Skywing closed his eyes and let himself delve into deep thought. _If I could get the tension between the clans higher, it would be easier to get them into fights. I can't really do anything at my current position. If only there was a way to bring Ripplewind or Dawnstar down. A war would be the perfect chance. I'll need to think about this moreâ€¦_

"Earth to Skywing! Earth to Skywing!" Snowflower's voice snapped him away from his thoughts. He then realized that the cats who were all talking had separated from the spot they were in. "Ripplewind wanted you to come with us on a hunting patrol." Skywing looked over and saw Ripplewind calling to various cats. He saw Cloudgaze, Nightstream, and Berryblaze gathering around. He'd guessed Snowflower and himself were the last two patrol members.

"Sure," Skywing stretched and got up on all fours. He didn't mind a chance to exercise and get away from the camp. It would give him more time to inspect the territory for anything that could help him with his ambition. He raced over to Ripplewind's patrol alongside Snowflower. "We're ready!" He called. Ripplewind nodded in satisfaction.

"We're all here now. Let us depart!" He meowed, stepping outside the camp with the rest of the patrol. Skywing looked back at the camp for a bit. He scanned the clearing and all of the cats. _One dayâ€¦ one day I will rule all of you. _He purred and turned back around to catch up to his clanmates on the patrol. _I can't wait for that day.

Skywing scanned the forest clearing for any prey. The patrol had split up in order to hunt prey individually. This was his chance to think undisturbed if he wanted. He noticed a vole running across the dirt. He slowly crouched down and stalked it from behind, making sure his tail was well hidden. His snow white fur meant he was easily visible in the forest. He made a big leap and crunched the rodent on the neck, killing it swiftly and painlessly. He began to bury his prey. _I'll come back for you later._ He headed out of the forest which bordered the Stardust Mountains. _Stoneclan is on the other side of this mountainâ€|_ He gazed into the entrance. This was his most hated place to be, yet it was the only entrance one could take if they were to go to Stoneclan directly from Goldclan. _I need a plan. I need to find a way to make Stoneclan fight._ He originally considered setting up a scenario where Stoneclan would attack Goldclan. _But I can't get Goldclan involved just yet. Tensions aren't too high between our clans at the moment. Howeverâ€|_

A flow of energy and electricity bounced through his body. He smirked. _I have an idea!_ He paced towards the Stardust Mountains, admiring how tall and grand it was. _I've been looking at this wrong all along. Why didn't I see this earlier? Stoneclan's tensions are extremely high with Silverclan's right now!_ It was perfect. What he really needed to do was take advantage of the two clans which were already highly on edge with each other. He quickly turned around and paced back into the forest to retrieve his prey. As he dug up the vole, another thought bounced around in his mind. Skywing snickered. He stared at the vole very curiously. _That's it. This is the key towards everything. Watch out, Stoneclan and Silverclan! Tomorrow's going to be a very interesting day!_

7. Chapter 6

Chapter 6

"I want Bramblethorn and Mintstorm to come along!" Lunarpelt meowed, stretching her limbs a bit. It was the day right after the big battle with Stoneclan. Lunarpelt was organizing the day's dawn patrol. Her eyes were still adjusting from sleep. The two cats in question padded over to Lunarpelt. "Lovepaw will come as well!" Lunarpelt beckoned for her apprentice to come over. The shy, ginger she cat obediently dashed up to them. Lunarpelt had been a mentor to Lovepaw for about 2 moons now. The small she-cat had been really timid at first, but she seemed to come out of her shell. Lovepaw would frequently praise her mentor, and it made Lunarpelt feel proud. _She's going to be a gallant warrior for her clan someday!_ Lunarpelt glanced around to see if there were any more cats she wanted to bring. She then noticed a certain tom stepping out of the warrior's den.

"Hmm, and lastly, I'll take Shadowtail!" Lunarpelt called. The dark gray cat was already walking up to her. He dipped a silent greeting.

"If we go hunting during this patrol, I'll make sure to catch more prey than you," he meowed. _Same old Shadowtail!_ The two cats have been fierce rivals ever since Lunarpelt first arrived in the clan as Lunarpaw. While they weren't enemies, they did have disagreements from time to time. Such was natural of a sworn rivalry.

"Like I'd let you beat _me_ in a competition of hunting," Lunarpelt

purred. "However. Our main concern is the borders. Especially the Stoneclan border. We sent out a few warriors to guard the springs last night, and it seems like none of the Stoneclan cats came back to the spring. That's good. It looks like they've given up. However, we can't be sure that they won't try and attack us in the future," Lunarpelt explained. Would Amberflare try to stop them if they wanted to get back at us?

"Well said Lunarpelt," Riverstar meowed. Lunarpelt dipped her head in greeting to the just awoken leader. "Tell me if you see anything strange."

"Will do!" Lunarpelt nodded. "Without further ado, I suppose we should head off," she beckoned for the cats on her patrol. The group of five cats stepped out of the camp and onto the grasslands that surrounded. Lovepaw, as usual, stayed close by her mentor. "Let's check the spring first!" The other cats in the group nodded in approval. As they neared the spring, a strong gust of wind blew against the cats, followed by the cry of a bird. Lunarpelt looked up to see a black crow dancing across the sky. A black crow, huh? That's a bad omenâ€¦ Lunarpelt picked up her pace. Shadowtail glanced at her questioningly, but didn't say anything.

It wasn't long before the patrol successfully crossed the valley and reached the spring. The blood of the battle had been washed away from the storm the night before. Patches of various colored fur were scattered randomly across the grass. However, there were no other cats there besides the patrol. Furthermore, there were no traces that Stoneclan cats had been here since the battle. "Strangeâ€¦" Lunarpelt commented.

"Perhaps they've realized that they've got no chance again us!" Bramblethorn commented, his tail wagging in satisfaction. That could be the case, butâ€¦

"Well, I suppose we'll just look in other areas. Let's check across the border and renew our scent marks," Lunarpelt meowed. The border was conveniently only a few fox lengths away from where they were. The cats walked down the line of the border, making sure their scent marks were fresh.

"What's that in the distance?" Lovepaw meowed. Lunarpelt scanned ahead to see what seemed to be the body of a piece of prey.

"Good observation. Let's check it out!" Lunarpelt dashed ahead and skidded to a stop. Right in front of her was the dead body of a rabbit. However, it doesn't seem as if it was eaten at all. Blood seared out of a wound in its neck. Lunarpelt gave it a sniff and detected Stoneclan scent on it. Lunarpelt bristled. So that's the game you want to play, Stoneclan!

"So, what is it?" Shadowtail asked.

"It's dead prey. Not buried, not eaten eitherâ€¦ just laying on our border. What an insult! It has Stoneclan scent all over it too!" Lunarpelt growled.

"So that's how they respond to us winning over our new territory fair and square! This can't be left alone. We should go over there right now and teach them a lesson!" Mintstorm hissed, curling her

tail impatiently. Lunarpelt sighed.

"As much as I want to. We have to report this to Riverstar first," Lunarpelt meowed. "Let's head back, quickly!" Lunarpelt dashed off in the direction of the camp. Her clanmates followed closely behind. _What cowards! Wasting prey like that! _Lunarpelt wondered of Amberflare had any part in that. _What if it was just one warrior's lone and bitter actions? No! It doesn't matter. If one warrior acts up, the clan is still responsible. We _must_ confront Shadestar about this!_

"Does this mean we're going to war again?" Lovepaw meowed solemnly.

"I don't know yet," was all Lunarpelt could say. _I know how you feel. I hate fighting too._ Lunarpelt looked up to see the camp entrance ahead. The cats rushed into the clearing. Riverstar flicked his ears.

"Back already? Did something happen?" Her leader bounded over to them.

"We found dead prey at the Stoneclan border. It seems that Stoneclan warriors have decided to taunt us by wasting our own prey on our own land!" Lunarpelt explained. _Maybe I shouldn't be jumping to accusations just yet. _Riverstar bristled.

"That's just like Shadestar. He's the type of cat who does things passive aggressively instead of confronting the problem itself. Let's go over and confront him directly about this!" Riverstar meowed. Several cats around the clearing jumped in excitement. "Hold your fur," Riverstar commented. "We're only going there to _question_ them about this incident and warn them. I don't want any more blood spilt over this whole situation. We won our territory back and Stoneclan needs to _get over it!_" Lunarpelt nodded in approval. _Yes. A nonviolent approach is the best way to go. _She shuddered, looking over at her clanmates. All of them seemed soâ€¦ bloodthirsty at the chance of battle. _I wonder if our cats really can go in a peaceful state of mind._

"So which cats will go?" Lunarpelt asked.

"Let's just go with the same patrol, except I'll tag along as well. We don't want to bring _too_ big of a force. Otherwise, they might get suspicious," Riverstar replied. Lunarpelt nodded in agreement. "Well, that settles it. Let's go," he dashed ahead. This time, Lunarpelt let him lead since he was the clan leader. Riverstar stopped once they reached the dead prey. He gave it a sniff and stared at it for a few seconds.

"There's no question. It's hard to make out but it _is_ Stoneclan scent," Riverstar sighed. "I was hoping it was just a rogue or something. Then we could just chase it off our territory and be done with it. But I guess that's just not how it works. Nevertheless, let's continue onward. I hope we don't meet any Stoneclan patrols on the way." Riverstar picked up the rabbit in his mouth and walked forward. The patrol stepped onto the other side of the border. Lunarpelt shivered. She didn't feel very comfortable on another clan's territory, _especially_ the territory of a clan they'd recently battled.

It wasn't that far into their territory that they caught scent of a patrol approaching. "Should we hide?" Mintstorm asked.

"I'd much rather we just face the patrol. We come in peace after all," Riverstar replied after putting down the rabbit in front of him. "Let's wait a bit for them to reach us." At that command, Lunarpelt sat down and let her legs relax. The other cats in the patrol seemed relieved as well. They'd spent their morning dashing around all over the place. To their luck, Amberflare was leading the patrol. Applesun, Smokeshine, Birdpaw, and Seedflame were present as well. The apprentice in the group alerted Amberflare to their presence. The deputy turned his head towards them. He seemed slightly distressed by their presence. _Figures. I wouldn't want cats I just fought appearing on my territory the next day. _

"Greetings, Silverclan. What are you doing on our territory today?" Amberflare asked, a slight sarcastic edge to his voice.

"Have you come to take _more_ territory?" Birdpaw hissed. Amberflare silenced him with his tail. Riverstar didn't seem phased, however the other cats on the Silverclan patrol bristled. Lunarpelt shot them a warning glance.

"We don't want conflict remember," she hissed. To her relief, Shadowtail and the others relaxed a bit.

"We're not here to fight. We just want to talk to Shadestar. We found this on our territory," Riverstar pawed at the dead rabbit. "It was lying dead on our territory. It had Stoneclan scent all over it," her leader explained.

"What? You're just gonna walk up to our territory and throw accusations?" Seedflame hissed. Amberflare sighed.

"I really don't think it's a good idea for you to come into our camp considering we just battled. I don't want to sound blunt, but there are other possibilities as to why the rabbit was there in the first place. Perhaps it's best if you turned back," Amberflare explained. He glanced at Riverstar as if pleading with him to go back home.

"I don't think I can do that. I want to speak to Shadestar. I request of you, in the most nonviolent manner I can, to take us to your camp," Riverstar meowed, his gaze serious.

"Do you want us to get our army again? We'll get you back for what you did yesterday!" Seedflame growled. Applesun rested her tail on his flank in an attempt to calm him.

"Disregard my warrior's comments. If you truly insist on coming along, then by all means. However, you will follow _our_ patrol," Amberflare meowed sternly.

"Thank you for your compliance. Don't worry, we mean no harm," Riverstar meowed politely. The patrol suddenly combined into a mixture of cats from both clans. The large group of cats headed into the Pine Forest towards the Stoneclan camp.

"Just a warning. Even if you did want to fight. Our camp is on the top of a cliff, as you know. Your small patrol wouldn't be able to

win against us," Amberflare meowed.

"Naturally," Riverstar meowed calmly. Lunarpelt noticed his tail was twitching slightly. She guessed that even he was losing a bit of his generally stable temper. Lunarpelt desperately wanted to try and get some alone time with Amberflare to ask him about everything, but alas, the group was too packed together for that.

The rest of the walk was silent. No cats said anything, although tension was very high in the air. _I suppose it's to be expected._ After the patrol had finally exited the woods, the giant mountain that contained the Stoneclan camp was in sight. "Be careful around the edges. Stoneclan is not responsible if any of your warriors falls off the cliff," Amberflare meowed with monotony. _I can tell he doesn't want to deal with this. But I don't want to either!_ Lunarpelt leaped onto the rocky path when it was her turn. Together, the patrol walked up the long edge. Lunarpelt stopped herself from panting. She, as well as the other Silverclan cats, weren't used to walking up such an incline. _No wonder Stoneclan cats are so muscular. They have to tread across these stony terrains daily!_ It wasn't long before they were finally at the top of the cliff. Ahead, there were giant huts made out of logs and straw all over the camp. Lunarpelt noticed how they could see all the territory around from this high up. She then shuddered. _Having a camp on the top of a mountain is dangerous. I wonder if kits or apprentices ever fall off._ Lunarpelt shivered at the thought.

"Amberflare you're bac- what are _they_ doing here?" A stoneclan cat who she recognized as Troustmist growled.

"The leader _and_ deputy came along as well. This is pretty serious," another Stoneclan cat meowed, seemingly to one of their clanmates. Ahead, Shadestar was already bounding towards them.

"Greetings, Riverstar. I welcome you and your warriors to our camp. What is the occasion?" Shadestar meowed. _Strange. He's not stuttering as usual._ Shadestar's gaze showed a distinct intensity to them. Lunarpelt couldn't tell if it was anger or grief.

Riverstar dropped the rabbit before Shadestar. "This is the occasion. We found this at our border full of Stoneclan scent. The possibility has occurred to us that Stoneclan might have been trying to sabotage our prey," Riverstar explained. Shadestar immediately bristled.

"Are you _serious_ Riverstar? You're going to _steal_ our territory and then barge into _my_ camp and throw baseless claims at us!?" Shadestar growled. _He's mad now!_ Lunarpelt sighed.

"Yes, in fact, I am. This is an insult!" Riverstar hissed. "Even if it wasn't intentional, you should keep better watch of your warriors. Prey is _invaluable_ especially when we're so close to Leafbare!" Riverstar and Shadestar bristled at each other. Lunarpelt wanted to try and calm her leader down, but she was too scared to intervene. The Stoneclan warriors seemed even more hostile than before. Various cats on their side of the field were bristling and baring their fangs.

"Prey is _invaluable_, _eh? How _lucky_ that your clan has the Glittering Springs again. I can tell you that our warriors have _no part_ in this. I don't know how that piece of prey got there. But

trust me, my clan isn't cowardly enough to throw prey at your territory. If we were really angry about the springs, we would have marched back over and taken them," Shadestar meowed. "Hmph! You're welcome for the springs, by the way. They're not really necessary for our clan. Consider it a donation to your clan."

"Now you're just being delusional!" Riverstar growled. But Shadestar's warriors started stepping forward.

"I would highly recommend you leave our camp, Riverstar. Your warriors are outnumbered. You have no chance of winning against us in our own camp," Shadestar bared his fangs. I guess they really are that mad about the springs. Lunarpelt shot Riverstar a look, hoping to snap him out of his anger. To her relief, Riverstar let out a calm sigh.

"Okay. We'll leave. I'm sorry for disturbing your camp," Riverstar meowed, turning around. "But one last thing. If we see this happening again on our territory, we will retaliate," he warned. Shadestar let out a growl as his response. The Silverclan patrol padded down the ramp and away from the camp. Lunarpelt felt relieved. We almost had a fight there!

"I'll stay on the back of the group and make sure they aren't pursuing us," Lunarpelt offered. Riverstar nodded in acknowledgement. She slowed her pace until the rest of her patrol was a few fox lengths ahead of her. She stopped for a moment. As expected, she could scent Amberflare from behind. She turned around to face him. He was alone.

"We need to talk about this," he meowed, dashing up to her. Lunarpelt turned her head to make sure her clanmates weren't watching. Sure enough, they were out of sight. "Listen. I really don't think that Stoneclan warriors did that. And I'm worried. Our clans have been in really high tension lately."

"Amberflare. You do realize the possibility that it could have been one of your warriors acting on their own. I wouldn't be surprised if it was Troustmist or someone," Lunarpelt replied. There's no way it couldn't be Stoneclan! After seeing the hostility of the Stoneclan cats at the camp. She was sure that they wanted to get back at Silverclan for the springs. Even if it wasn't a decision made by Shadestar, she could imagine a few of the Stoneclan cats being bitter about the loss, and acting on their own accord.

"Please listen to me! Things could get very dangerous if we aren't careful!" Amberflare pleaded, his voice full of worry.

"I know I sniffed Stoneclan scent on that rabbit!" Lunarpelt responded.

"How do you know for sure!?" Amberflare challenged.

"Oh Amberflare. How do I know it wasn't you who put the prey there? Anything is possible," Lunarpelt remarked, turning around and walking off to catch up to her patrol.

"Don't tell me you're really that much of a mousebrain!" Amberflare called. But Lunarpelt ignored him. She raced ahead until the Silverclan patrol was in sight. Suddenly, she noticed that the patrol

had stopped at the border.

"What's the matter?" Lunarpelt asked. She then stopped dead. _No way! There's no way!_ Just ahead of them were three dead voles lying on the border. "Not one, not two, but THREE voles!? What in the name of Starclanâ€|?"

"They're definitely Stoneclan scent too! There's no mistake about it!" Mintstorm commented.

"But we were just at their camp!" Riverstar growled. "Did some of their warriors do this while we were there!? So that's their game, huh?" Lunarpelt was taken aback. It was rare to see her leader this legitimately angry. "Alright, Silverclan warriors. Before we head back, let's 'increase' our boundaries by marking our scent 2 fox lengths ahead of the border mark!"

"Great idea! If they haven't learned their lesson, then we'll just have to take more of _their_ territory as a consequence!" Shadowtail meowed, lashing his tail in anger. Although Lunarpelt could share their anger, she began to feel unsettled. A big feeling of dread began to take hold of her spine. _What does the future hold in store for our clans?_

8. Chapter 7

Chapter 7

"That will teach those mangy Stoneclan rats a lesson!" A Silverclan warrior yowled. Skywing watched as the Silverclan patrol, led by Riverstar and Lunarpelt headed back to their territory. _Hmmâ€|so they extended their boundary over the Stoneclan border. There's no way Stoneclan will settle this in a peaceful manner. Looks like my work here is done._ Skywing nodded in satisfaction and headed back. His pelt was drenched in Stoneclan scent. He spend what had seemed like moons bathing in the Stoneclan scent markers outside of Goldclan to disguise his scent. He then had to swiftly catch prey and lay them on the border before the cats that went into Stoneclan's territory returned. He had almost been caught various times. It was amongst the most stressful things that he had done. _I can't go back to camp like this. _Skywing purred. _I guess there's only one thing to do now!_ Up ahead was Goldclan territory, but before heading into it, Skywing glanced at the river whose current was relatively weak today._ Skywing leaped into the water, letting himself splash underneath the surface. He purred as he lifted his head above and took a breath. _It feels so refreshing!_ Skywing dived back into the water again. _The current is heading inwards into my territory. _Skywing let the current take him across the water. He twirled his body in a spinning motion in a playful manner. He was at absolute peace. Nothing could bother him right now. Minnows flapped against his pelt as they swam by, as if greeting him. _Listen up Minnows. I am your new emperor! Obey me!_ He went back up to take a breath. The camp was still not in sight yet. _I still have more time._ He happily went back under the surface. This time, a particularly strong current took him. He once again spun his body in a 360 motion, riding the current. He felt like a fast flying eagle being shot across the river. He began to feel slightly nervous when the current didn't slow. He would have to go up for a breath soon. Relief hit him as he noticed his speed slowing. As soon as the current died down he pulled himself back up, taking a

nice long breath. _That was close!_ Although most cats wouldn't dare to do what he just did, Skywing happened to be a skillful swimmer. He liked to believe that his agility and swimming abilities helped make up for his lackluster fighting skills. He looked to his right to see that the camp was in sight. He swam to the shore of the river and pulled himself out. Any scent he had on him was completely erased. He shook his pelt back and forth, letting excess water fly out of his fur.

"Hey Skywing!" Snowflower called. Skywing purred. _I hope she stays loyal to me always._ Snowflower always seemed to be so happy to see him. "Did you go for a swim again?" He had almost forgotten his pelt was all wet. _Well swimming is a good excuse!_

"Erâ€|yeah! The water felt great!" Skywing meowed. He went up to her and greeted her by licking her cheek with his tongue. Snowflower purred.

"Come. Let's get back into the camp. The sun will set soon," she meowed. Skywing nodded and walked with her inside of the camp. Skywing wondered how Silverclan and Stoneclan were doing. _I wonder if they're fighting again. I guess I'll hear about it tomorrow._ A bitter feeling rushed through his fur when he saw Dawnstar and Ripplewind chatting in the clearing. He despised them. They had all the power in the clan that _he_ wanted. _I want to take Dawnstar down. Wait, if I do that, then Ripplewind will just take over and I'll have to see him for the rest of his 9 lives!_ Skywing sighed.

"Is something the matter?" Snowflower asked, nosing her way into his business again.

"Nothing. I'm just tired," Skywing let out a fake but somehow convincing yawn. _Fine then. I'll take down Ripplewind first. Maybe I can take his place, then?_ Skywing wondered if Dawnstar saw him as fit for a future leadership position. Skywing would need to prove his worth as a loyal and gallant cat of Goldclan if he ever wanted to make progress. As he walked into the clearing, a few cats stared at him curiously due to his wet pelt. _What? It's normal for a cat to take a swim every once in a while!_ Skywing listened closely to hear what kinds of conversations were happening as various cats shared tongues.

"Did you see the giant vole that Antwhisker caught? It was huge!"

"I wonder if the river will freeze up during leafbare?"

"Don't be mouse-brained! The river current is always running. That won't happen!"

"I heard there was a fox spotted in Rainclan territory! I hope it doesn't come here!"

"Twinfeather's going to be kitting any day now! I wonder how many kits she'll have!" Skywing grumbled to himself. _All of these conversations are pointless and uninteresting!_ He sighed and sat down in a random shaded area in the clearing.

"Ripplewind has been getting on my last nerve lately! Yesterday he scolded me for accidently skidding across the Stoneclan border when I

was chasing a mouse. I mean c'mon! I would have had it if he hadn't yelled at me!" Suddenly, Skywing's attention was in full gear. He turned to the direction of the voice, trying to locate the cat who spoke. He saw Tinypelt chatting with Berryblaze a little ways away.

"The other day he got upset at me because I accidentally hit him with my tail in his sleep! He can be such a grouch at times!" Berryblaze meowed. _Ripplewind isn't as respected as I thought he was. Perhaps I can use these two cats in the future against him. _Skywing grinned sinisterly. He got up from his spot and headed toward the fresh kill pile. He had caught a rabbit and a sparrow earlier before he left on his journey to the Stoneclan/Silverclan border. So technically he was allowed to eat if he had wanted. He choose a medium sized mouse and brought it over.

"Hey Snowflower! Want to share a mouse?" He offered. The she-cat looked up at him.

"Sure!" Snowflower padded over to him as he dropped the prey. Both of them began chewing into the delicious rodent. While he ate, Skywing began thinking of his current plans. _So it looks like I've managed to raise the tensions between Silverclan and Stoneclan even more. Perhaps it's time to get Goldclan involved. _Skywing wondered if it was too soon. _No. I'll give it a few days. _He sighed of relief. He had no reason to dangerously trek back into the Silverclan/Stoneclan border again. If the tensions really had flared up as much as he did, then the cats of those clans would find ways to sabotage and fight each other. He had done all the sparking he need. _All of this could have been avoided if Riverstar wasn't such a flea-brain. Who threatens other cats at gatherings like that anyway?_ He glanced at Snowflower, and then at Berryblaze and Tinypelt. _Three invaluable allies so far._ Skywing would need to build up more allies in the future if he were to successfully maintain his control over Goldclan. He sighed and rolled over on his side after he finished his share of the mouse.

"Tired already? We still have a bit of sunlight left," Snowflower commented. Skywing didn't respond. He closed his eyes and let his body destress itself after the long day. A strong, heavy feeling engulfed his body. It was none other than pure exhaustion. For the past moon, Skywing has been furiously plotting and acting on ways that would bring him closer to his goal. Every day he was hard at work. Today in particular was a rush. Adrenaline had been racing through his body as he scampered on territories that were not his. He had run all over the place, finding ways to sabotage Stoneclan and Silverclan. He had even had to take a break in between to come back to the Goldclan camp so that cats wouldn't be suspicious if he was gone too long. He had to consider every single possibility and danger in his ploys. He was always full of constant worry. Worried that he'd be caught. Worried that he'd fail. Worried that Regalclaw would be ashamed of him for not being able to unite the clans. Skywing tried to let any anxious thoughts leave his mind. _I've been too overworked. But there's no time to rest!_ Skywing wanted to tell himself that, but he felt himself drifting away. "C'mon, you can't just fall asleep in the middle of the clearing," Snowflower hissed. Skywing gently raised himself. His head was hot with exhaustion. He slowly got up and headed toward the warrior's den, hoping no cat would be upset that he would be retiring to bed a bit early. He padded towards his usual nest and laid down. As soon as he closed his

eyes, his body took him immediately into sleep.

He woke up. He was in a large den. Twoleg artifacts and paintings littered the walls. He was in a large, red clothed nest. He stretched his legs and stood up. He walked over to the golden crown that always lay beside his den and gently raised it with his paws, setting it carefully on his head. The string attached to it wrapped around to the bottom of his chin, allowing the crown to stay firmly placed on the top of his head. He then padded out of the den. Ahead of him was a vast clearing. He was inside of the Twoleg Fortress. He had been dreaming again. He looked ahead to see a vast array of cats duck their heads in greeting. He walked across the clearing as cats moved out of his way quickly. When he reached the outside, he could see the entire forest from atop his hill. He was the ruler of the forest. _It's almost too good to be real!_ And that it was. He knew that when he awoke later, he'd be back at his mossy nest in Goldclan, only to do tedious warrior duties as usual. When Skywing looked to the sky, he saw Regalclaw's face staring down at him. It was large and bigger than the clouds. Regalclaw looked proud. _You'll be proud when I make all of this a reality! I promise!_ Skywing purred and gazed majestically across the forest. One day, this dream of his would become a reality.

9. Chapter 8

Chapter 8

The morning mist filled the clearing as it sparkled like dew in the sunrise. Autumnwind stretched his legs before stepping out of the warrior's den. His fur was slightly moist from the damp air. The clearing was mostly empty outside of a few cats that were awake. Stormfall was in the clearing talking to Mistyfur. Oakleaf and Flamewillow were sitting together, likely chatting about the time when they were once warriors. Firesoul was emerging from the Medicine Cat's den. "Morning, Firesoul!" Autumnwind called. The ginger medicine cat seemed pleased to see him.

"How convenient! I was just about to do a morning herb haul. Lately, Stormfall requested that I bring a warrior with me when I go to gather herbs. Want to come with me?" Firesoul asked.

"Sure! I'd be happy to," Autumnwind replied.

"Tensions in the clans are at an all-time high. You never know when a Silverclan cat is going to act up," Stormfall commented, padding up to them. Autumnwind dipped his head in greeting.

"That's true. Silverclan already stole some of Stoneclan's territory yesterday. We have to make sure that we're extra careful about our own territory," Autumnwind meowed.

"Anyway. We'll be off now. Good luck on the Dawn patrol," Firesoul meowed, beckoning Autumnwind to follow. Autumnwind followed Firesoul out of the camp and into the grassy paths that bordered their camp.

"So, which herb are you looking for today?" Autumnwind asked, as he walked with Firesoul.

"Catmint. Leafbare is coming up, and Whistleleaf doesn't want to be short on it when the inevitable Greencough bout comes," Firesoul sighed. Autumnwind felt a pang of pity for him. Leafbare was amongst the hardest months for Medicine cats. With constant illnesses springing up and cold weather destroying herbs, Firesoul and Whistleleaf would have it harsh.

"So where does catmint usually grow?" Autumnwind questioned.

"You can find it in the edge of the Treesprout Woods by the Drago River. Of course, that river is what borders our two territories, so we'd better be cautious," Firesoul commented.

"We're still on our territory though. I'll claw a Silverclan cat if they think that our medicine cat isn't able to gather herbs on our own territory," Autumnwind meowed, feeling fire rushing through his fur. Firesoul mrowed in amusement.

"You're awfully energetic today," Firesoul purred.

"I'm a morning cat. I always have all my energy when I wake up," Autumnwind commented. "That's why Stormfall usually chooses me for the dawn patrols. But I guess today I get a break from that, since I'm going with you." Autumnwind enjoyed Firesoul's company. The two were close friends. Even when they were kits, they played around in the nursery despite the fact that they weren't littermates. Autumnwind was the only one from his own litter that survived the harsh Leafbare he was born in. His sisters Lilykit and Winterkit had gotten greencough, and were both taken by it. Autumnwind was lucky enough to have not contracted the illness. Firesoul and his brother Raccoonwater had felt sorry for Autumnwind and treated him like a brother to make up for his lost littermates. He had always been grateful to the two cats for their kindness.

"I can already smell the catmint from here," Firesoul commented. Autumnwind worked his nostrils and picked up a pleasant scent from afar.

"I can smell it too!" Autumnwind purred. Catmint had this irresistible aroma that would drive any cat crazy. It wasn't long before he could see the stems of purple flowers ahead. Firesoul began to nip off the stems and gather them.

"I'll gather as much as I can for both of us to carry," Firesoul meowed with a mouthful of herbs. He began neatly placing the catmint herbs on top of each other in a nice pile. Autumnwind was about to start helping him nip them when he heard cats chattering ahead. He quickly alerted Firesoul, who stopped what he was doing. Ahead, a Silverclan patrol was marking their territory on the other side of the river. The shadows of the forest protected Autumnwind and Firesoul from sight. The two Rainclan cats listened in to hear the conversation of the Silverclan cats.

"Good! It seems Rainclan is at least aware of their boundaries," Icicleclaw meowed. Autumnwind tried to make out all of the cats on the patrol. Lunarpelt was with Icicleclaw, along with Mintstorm, Shadowtail, and Lovepaw.

"That means there won't be any fighting, right?" Lovepaw mewed concernedly. Lunarpelt put her tail gently on her apprentice.

"Don't worry. Fighting is the last thing I want right now. After Stoneclan destroyed our prey and set their boundaries really far into our territory, I don't want problems with another clan," the Silverclan deputy replied.

"Technically, we extended our borders first," Shadowtail remarked.

"But they ruined our prey first!" Icicleclaw bristled.

"Come on! No fighting! Let's get back to camp. The borders are in check," Lunarpelt sternly meowed. The other cats followed. Autumnwind waited until the cats were out of sight before speaking.

"We have to tell Redstar about this," Autumnwind mewed hastily.

"I agree," Firesoul meowed briefly, running over to his catmint stack. Autumnwind helped him gather it up and the two cats scurried back to camp, herbs in their mouths. I wonder if Silverclan and Stoneclan will go to war again. Autumnwind sighed. Those two clans were getting quite troublesome lately. At least Goldclan has been quiet lately. When they reached the camp, Firesoul slowed from a run to a quick pace towards the den. Autumnwind slowed down with him. I guess he doesn't want to alarm the clan by running into the camp. Firesoul placed the catmint in a nice pile that was in the back of the den. "You can place them here." Autumnwind nodded and placed his mouthful down as well in the pile.

"Greetings. I'm guessing the herb gathering went well?" Whistleleaf purred, seemingly having just awoken. Firesoul nodded.

"Autumnwind and I need to report something to Redstar. I'll be back in a bit," Firesoul meowed. Whistleleaf nodded in understanding. The two cats headed towards the giant yew tree that stood in the back of the camp. The giant hole in the trunk which served as Redstar's den had brambles protecting the entrance. "Redstar. It's me, Firesoul. Autumnwind is with me," Firesoul meowed.

"Come in," Redstar meowed sleepily.

"I hope we didn't wake you," Firesoul mewed.

"No worries. I was just getting up myself," Redstar stretched his limbs before sitting up and curling his tail around his paws. "Did you have an omen?"

"Not exactly," Firesoul began. Autumnwind and Firesoul took turns describing the events that took place at the Silverclan border. Redstar sat still for a moment, seemingly gathering his thoughts.

"I see now. I suppose Riverstar and Shadestar are having a territorial war. Their borders are being extended into each other. I wouldn't be surprised if there was another battle," Redstar shook his head. "They're like a bunch of kits. Fighting over a spring and then messing with each other's prey and borders. I guess they don't have the maturity to settle things in a peaceful manner," Redstar concluded. "Thanks for letting me know. I'll make sure all of our patrols are extra wary around the Silverclan border. Considering they're on edge right now, I wouldn't be surprised if they tried to

extend into _our_ borders. I think I'll call a clan meeting later. But first we'll need to wait for all the patrols to come back." Autumnwind and Firesoul nodded and gently stepped out of the den.

"Well, I need to get back to Whistleleaf. Take care now," Firesoul meowed, padding over to the Medicine cat's den. Autumnwind nodded and looked around the clearing.

"Hey Autumnwind!" Grayvine called in greeting. Autumnwind waved his tail and greeting and walked over to his clanmate. "Can I asked what that was about?"

"Things happened at the Silverclan border. Redstar's going to call a meeting as soon as Stormfall's patrol comes back," Autumnwind replied.

"More trouble with Silverclan?" Grayvine sighed. "I guess I couldn't expect any less from them. It's not with us is it? Did they attack you!?"

"No. We didn't confront them. And their problem isn't with usâ€¦|_yet_|." Autumnwind noticed that a group of Rainclan cats was heading in the entrance. "Perfect timing. There's the patrol," Autumnwind meowed. Redstar seemingly heard the cats coming in as he stepped outside of the yew tree. He climbed up the tree and sat on the great branch.

"Let all cats old enough to catch their own prey gather by the high branch for a clan meeting," he yowled. Stormfall looked puzzled but intrigued. As soon as the cats gathered, Redstar hushed them with his tail. He began explaining the whole story about the Silverclan and Stoneclan skirmish, and what Autumnwind and Firesoul heard at the border. "I ask that every cat take extra care at the Silverclan border. It's very possible that they'll try and invade _our_ territory to. They've already stolen the springs from Stoneclan, and even extended their boundaries. We can't let them think they can do the same to us," Redstar meowed. Cats in the crowd roared with agreement.

"We should attack some of their territory. They're thieves anyway!" Springfur yowled. Some of the cats around him seemingly agreed as they murmured in approval. Emeraldclaw seemed oddly distraught about his comment.

"How about we _not!_ That would make _us_ thieves as well!" Emeraldclaw grunted. _How strange. Usually he's quick to jump on the fight bandwagon. _

"You're just afraid of fighting them. I heard about how you didn't attack Lunarpelt at the border skirmish the other day. Are you too afraid to defend your own clan? I guess it's to be expected, if you aren't really a Rainclan cat," Springfur teased. Emeraldclaw bristled in mass frustration. _Here we go again..._

"Stop it! All of you! No one is invading anyone! We're only going on the defense!" Redstar yowled, glaring at the two cats. Springfur flattened his ears while Emeraldclaw turned away defensively. Autumnwind sighed. _Troublesomeâ€¦|_troublesomeâ€¦|_ "Anyway. That's all I had to say. Dismissed," Redstar meowed, climbing down from the

tree. Autumnwind looked for Stormfall in the crowd of ungathering cats.

"Can I go on a hunt? I've been itching to do something useful," Autumnwind asked.

"That's a great idea! You can take Raccoonwater with you," Stormfall meowed, beckoning the black tom.

"Hi Autumnwind. Stormfall," he meowed in greeting. "What did you need me for?"

"Autumnwind wanted to go on a hunt. Want to go with him?" Stormfall asked.

"Sure! Let's go!" Raccoonwater purred. The two cats headed outside of the camp. "Want to compete for who gets the most prey?"

"It's on! You know I'll win though," Autumnwind purred.

"In your dreams!" Raccoonwater was cut off by the sound of yowling. Both of the cats immediately looked around in alarm. "Did you hear that?"

"It sounded like it came from this way," Autumnwind pointed to the direction of the mountains. The two cats raced off towards the sound. Autumnwind could smell cats as well. The scents were all from Rainclan cats. They approached a big stone and peered around it. Autumnwind's eyes widened at the scene. He saw Emeraldclaw and Lionleap standing over a cat. Emeraldclaw seemingly had the cat pinned down. Autumnwind recognized it as Springfur.

"Who's afraid now?" Emeraldclaw meowed in a sinister voice. He prodded Springfur violently. "Are you going to take back what you said earlier in the camp?"

"Never! You're a vile piece of crowfo!" Springfur coughed as Emeraldclaw pushed hard on his neck. The white tomcat had a very fiery expression in his emerald eyes. _I've never seen Emeraldclaw this angry!_

"What's wrong? Don't you have anything to say?" Emeraldclaw snickered. Springfur's eyes went from angry to fearful. "That's a good kitten. Now maybe you'll learn to watch what you say in the future." Autumnwind couldn't bear to sit still any longer. He rushed into the fray.

"Emeraldclaw. Get off of him!" Autumnwind demanded. Emeraldclaw turned around to face him, while Lionleap bristled, ready to spring. "What do you two think you're doing? How dare you attack your own clanmate like that!?"

"Don't come any closer!" Lionleap warned.

"Ah, if it isn't the ole' righteous cat," Emeraldclaw meowed, his eyes glowing with a sinister amusement. "This one over here insulted me during that meeting. You heard the terrible things he spouted. It's only fair that he learns his lesson," Emeraldclaw explained, tightening his grip on Springfur's neck.

"You're going to choke him!" Raccoonwater gasped, jumping beside Autumnwind.

"Don't worry. I won't go that far," Emeraldclaw meowed. "Anyway, I think this idiot has learned his lesson." He unpinning Springfur and let the defeated cat stand up. Springfur coughed as he got to his paws. Lionleap stood aside as Springfur padded towards Autumnwind and Raccoonwater. Springfur turned around to face Emeraldclaw.

"You're a wicked and vile cat! I don't care whether you're from Rainclan or not! I hate you! I've always hated you!" Springfur's fur began to rile up in fury. "You've never treated me with any respect. I have never wronged you!" Autumnwind knew that wasn't true. Springfur, as an apprentice, had once been very hostile towards Emeraldclaw, who was Emeraldpaw at the time. Emeraldpaw had faced a lot of bullying back then. _All because he wasn't born in this clan._ Autumnwind sighed. He looked towards Emeraldclaw. To his surprise, the white tom didn't seem hostile anymore. Autumnwind couldn't read his expression. Emeraldclaw and Lionleap said nothing as the three cats began to walk away.

"Are you okay?" Raccoonwater asked when they were farther away. Springfur shook his pelt.

"I'm fine. They didn't injure me any," Springfur meowed. _Maybe not physically!_

"Let's tell Redstar when we get back!" Autumnwind decided. Springfur stood in front of the two cats.

"Please don't. I don't want any more problems. This is my fight, and I'll deal with it," he meowed.

"Don't be mouse-brained! Our clan can't run well when there are cats in conflict. These things must be reported and resolved!" Autumnwind adamantly meowed.

"Are you sure you don't want to tell Redstar?" Raccoonwater pressed, being the gentler of the two.

"I'm sure. Don't worry. Everything will be fine," Springfur meowed reassuringly. Autumnwind wasn't convinced. Springfur's gaze was still clouded in fury. _Once a bully, and now the bullied. _

"If you say so," Autumnwind sighed. "How are going to face Stoneclan and Silverclan if our own cats don't get along." He glanced over at the Silverclan border. _Just what is that clan up to? Will we have to fight them in the future?_

End
file.